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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the need for tailor-made support services for college students with learning disabilities based on sound diagnostic/prescriptive evaluation data. Literature on program design and the development of effective individualized education programs is reviewed, and performance contracts developed with student input are viewed as highly beneficial to the student/institution relationship. Program issues including remedial versus compensatory instructional services and helping services work toward independence are also discussed. A program planning worksheet is attached. Contains six references. (PB)

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DESIGNING SUPPORT SERVICES AND INSTRUCTION FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: USE OF DIAGNOSTIC DATA

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ABSTRACT

If postsecondary institutions are to be reactive to the current position set forth by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities and thereby provide appropriate and effective services to students with learning disabilities, personnel must be prepared to not only implement Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 in providing "equal access" but must also assist the student in planning educational goals and objectives. This paper addresses the need to design tailor-made support services for college students with learning disabilities based upon sound diagnostic/prescriptive evaluation data. In addition, program issues including remedial vs. compensatory instructional services and helping students work toward independence are discussed.

DESIGNING SUPPORT SERVICES AND INSTRUCTION FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: USE OF DIAGNOSTIC DATA

Introduction

Since the early 1970's, postsecondary institutions have become aware that students with specific learning disabilities have the ability and desire to go to college (Mangrum & Strichart, 1984). With the passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, these institutions were faced with the dilemma of establishing procedures for effectively serving this population. Diagnostic/prescriptive evaluation data has been used successfully to develop identification and admission criteria in many colleges and universities throughout the country; yet, Mangrum and Strichart (1984) report that there is still an insufficient number of programs that provide for the specialized needs of students with learning disabilities.

If postsecondary institutions are to successfully provide services to this population, personnel must be prepared to assist students in selecting the correct college setting (McGuire & Shaw, 1987) and in developing appropriate educational goals. Accomplishing these tasks requires the use of diagnostic/prescriptive data to identify the pattern of individual abilities and disabilities necessary for planning interventions. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities in a 1985 position paper strongly

recommends the selection of appropriate postsecondary educational and vocational training settings based upon each individual's strengths and weaknesses. This position paper states that "Program selection and choice of intervention strategies must be based on the results of a comprehensive and integrated assessment of the individual that provides a description of specific patterns of abilities and disabilities" (p. 165).

As professionals begin to refine their evaluation process, they must also consider the formulation of a comprehensive plan of instructional recommendations (Norlander, Bloomer, & Czajkowski, 1986). Development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is recommended with specific instructional goals and objectives being set by a planning team which should actively involve the student.

In planning the IEP, Norlander and Czajkowski (1986) suggest that the instructor and the student address the following issues in light of evaluation results.

1. Program Issues:

- Will student intervention be remedial, tutorial, strategic, or compensatory in nature?
- How can the student be best assisted in working towards independence?

2. IEP/Program Development:

- How much support time will the student require and What will the nature of the support be?
- Who should be involved in the development and implementation of the instructional goals and objectives?
- Has the student selected not only the appropriate postsecondary setting, but the correct course of study (major) given his or her learning strengths and weaknesses?

Program Issues

Once students have been admitted into a learning disabilities support program, diagnostic/prescriptive data must be carefully evaluated to determine whether services to be provided should include individualized instruction, remediation, compensatory strategies, or tutorial support in specific coursework (Vogel, 1987). It is likely that LD college programs offer more than one type of service and that most students do not need every support service all the time. Therefore, in order to meet the individual needs of each student with a learning disability and to make efficient use of the limited resources available at a particular institution, the most appropriate services need to be identified.

Choosing appropriate services, however, is an on-going process and is determined by many factors including the skill level of the student, the demands of his/her academic program, and the resources and philosophy of the postsecondary institution. The IEP provides a framework for direct service by identifying and prioritizing the instructional needs and support services necessary for a specific student during a particular period of time. In many instances, LD college support programs operate in a "bandaid" fashion, helping students complete a semester but failing to look at the long-range objectives necessary to help a student be independently successful. This plan provides an opportunity for the instructor and the student to develop both long and short-term goals which may be adjusted as the student's needs change.

Frequently, the issue of what type of service to provide is linked to the philosophy of the postsecondary institution and the available resources. Remediation, for example, may be a more prevalent issue at a community college where there is open-admission than at a university where the admission process is more selective. However, regardless of the types of services provided, the goal of all LD college support programs should be to help students develop academic and social independence by using diagnostic data to develop appropriate support services.

Encouraging independence in college students with learning disabilities is beneficial not only to the students but also to the support program. As students become more confident and adept at identifying and meeting their needs, they will require less direct service, thus enabling more students to take advantage of support services. The IEP approach teaches students the skills they need to function independently and assists them in learning how to use existing campus resources which are available to all students. Self-advocacy and the development of communication skills facilitate the students' ability to meet their own needs. In addition, problem-solving skills teach students how to evaluate situations and make appropriate decisions. A common goal for all students with learning disabilities receiving support services should be to work toward a planned and gradual reduction of direct service.

Program Development

One result of P.L. 94-142, which provided for comprehensive services to handicapped students at the secondary level, was the development of the IEP. While this plan is not mandated for postsecondary institutions, it can be a useful tool in selecting appropriate services for college students with learning disabilities. By helping to write his or her IEP, a student is encouraged to become an

active part of the educational process which is often the first step toward independence. A worksheet, such as the one illustrated in Figure 1, can be used to translate diagnostic/prescriptive data into instructional goals and objectives. The development of the IEP should consider such issues as choosing an appropriate postsecondary setting, determining appropriate student services, and identifying individual goals and objectives.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

Even though a student may have gained admission to a particular postsecondary institution, it is not necessarily the most appropriate setting. By evaluating diagnostic data, the service provider can help a student determine if he/she has made a suitable choice. The student's academic skills, learning strengths and weaknesses, and career aspirations as well as the characteristics of the institution need to be considered at this point. If the student appears to be misplaced, he/she may need some help in exploring other postsecondary options; however, if the match seems appropriate, student services can be determined (McGuire & Shaw, 1987).

Most students with learning disabilities require some type of compensatory services in order to succeed at the

postsecondary level. These services should be chosen on the basis of a student's strengths and weaknesses which can be determined by analyzing diagnostic/prescriptive data. For example, a student who reads well but has difficulty writing will probably not need taped textbooks, but may require the use of a tape recorder in lecture classes or extended time on essay tests and written assignments. The academic levels and content of a student's courses may also indicate the type of compensatory services the student may need in a given semester.

The next area to be addressed is the type and amount of direct support service a student will receive. The issues here center around the need for strategy training, remediation, content tutoring, and counseling. At some point in his or her education, a student may require all of these services but not simultaneously. The function of the IEP is to provide a progressive sequence for these services and to determine the areas of priority.

The IEP is a cognitive as well as a visual plan and helps both the service provider and the student break down long-term goals into manageable units. It is then easier to estimate the amount of time that will be needed per week for the student to achieve his/her goals as well as the way in which the services can best be coordinated. A unique aspect of the IEP is that it allows the service provider and student

to plan for independence. If a student initially needs an extra hour on a multiple choice exam, for example, the IEP can be written to include a progressive reduction of extended time on tests and at the same time build in instructional strategies for better test preparation and test-taking skills. The student will be able to understand the long-range independence goal as well as the specific steps he/she will take to reach that goal.

An IEP is best developed through a team planning meeting which involves the student, service provider(s), and any additional support personnel. Interested faculty members, especially a referring professor, may benefit from the IEP process, learning not only about the needs of a particular student but also about learning disabilities and the support program in general. Other support staff who might have a part in implementing the student's IEP should be encouraged to attend the planning meeting. These might include academic advisors, career or personal counselors, department chairmen, disabled student services personnel, student affairs personnel, and instructional staff involved with learning labs, tutorial services, or computer technology. Since most postsecondary students are of majority age, it is not necessary to invite parents to attend the team meetings unless the student requests that they be involved.

Summary

The types of direct service provided for college students with learning disabilities, the management of those services, and the time allotted will vary from institution to institution. LD college programs with limited budgets, staff, or space may be able to take advantage of existing campus resources. An IEP is particularly useful under these conditions and can be used to coordinate and organize services which might otherwise be fragmented. The participation of the student in developing the IEP creates a "contract" between the service provider and the student by having all parties indicate that they are in agreement with the identified goals and objectives. Putting the support services in writing not only protects the service provider, but actively involves the student in his/her educational program.

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I. SELECTION OF AN APPROPRIATE POSTSECONDARY SETTING

A. What "type" of college setting is most appropriate for this student?

_____ community college
_____ private junior college
_____ four year private college
_____ four year public college
_____ four year university
_____ "special" college for LD students
_____ vocational training program

B. What size school would be most beneficial?

C. Other considerations?

II. STUDENT SERVICES

A. What type(s) of "compensatory" services will this student need to have available to him/her?

_____ texts on tape
_____ note-taking modifications (what type?)
_____ computer facilities (word processors)
_____ readers
_____ tape recorded lectures
_____ testing modifications (what type?)
_____ other

B. What type(s) of direct services will this student need?

_____ content tutors (in what areas?)

_____
_____
_____

_____ services from a learning specialist (in what areas?)

_____
_____
_____

Figure 1. Program Planning Worksheet.

B. (continued)

_____ counseling (please specify for what reason and purpose)

_____
_____
_____

- Estimate how much (time) direct service this student will need weekly. _____

- How can these services best be coordinated? _____
_____

- How will we assist the student in working toward "independence"? _____
_____
_____

III. INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING

A. List the possible instructional goals for this student.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

B. Under each goal, list the possible short-term objectives, instructional methods or strategies, and evaluation criteria.

Figure 1 (continued). Program Planning Worksheet.